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## **Exploring the Basic Roles and Skills of Peer Guiders in Secondary School through Psychoeducational Group Interventions**

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### **Abstract**

The existence of Peer Guiders (PRS) in schools can have a positive impact on building a prosperous learning environment. Disciplinary problems and moral decay of students can be reduced if PRS carries out its duties well and becomes an effective role model for peers. This study aims to explore the role and basic skills of PRS through psychoeducational group intervention. The study participants consisted of 6 students at a secondary school aged 13 who were newly appointed as PRS members. The research methodology is qualitative using a case study design. A total of 4 psychoeducational group intervention sessions were conducted face-to-face. Interview and observation data were analyzed using a thematic and coding process to generate themes. The findings of the study resulted in 3 main themes, namely (1) PRS personality, (2)

PRS basic communication skills and (3) action planning to improve PRS quality. The sub-themes for the theme (1) are being brave, helping friends and keeping secrets. The sub-theme for the theme (2) is paying attention when listening and not responding quickly. While the sub-theme that emerged for the theme (3) is guiding friends towards goodness, paying attention when listening and keeping secrets. The implications of this study can provide information and guidance to Guidance and Counseling Teachers in schools to see the current level of knowledge and skills of PRS members and plan the next intervention and guidance process. A suggestion for future research is to apply the psychoeducation group intervention module in this study to senior PRS members.

**Keywords:** Psychoeducational Group Intervention, the Role of Peer Mentors, Peer Mentoring Skills

### **1. Introduction**

Peer Guiders (PRS) is one of the leading units that act as a facilitator to assist the work of the Guidance and Counseling Unit in a school as well as assisting Teachers Guidance and Counseling (GBK) in the process of shaping the physical, and mental and spiritual well-being of students (Ahmad Zulhildi *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[3]</sup>. In the face of the increasingly challenging challenges of the 21st century, school GBKs need to be assisted with quality and high-confidence PRS involvement as well as having the right basic counselling skills so that the help is achieved (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015).

The PRS Training Programme, which was first introduced in Malaysian schools around 1986, has a clear philosophy of establishing which is to make room for peers who are considered to have a strong influence on themselves as they grow older in their teens. Teenagers are said to be more comfortable when interacting with peers than parents or adults (Zuraidah, 1996) <sup>[22]</sup>. According to Jas Laile Suzana (2000) <sup>[14]</sup> argues, teenagers prefer to spend time with peers because they think their peers are more understanding of what they want from the world of the environment.

Overseas and local studies prove that peers have a strong influence on adolescents (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). In the pursuit of life goals and self-identity, adolescents rely heavily on peers for guidance and support for their inclinations. Teenagers prefer and are open to spending time with their peers as they can provide a situation free from any form of prohibition or restriction (Othman *et al.*, 2019) <sup>[17]</sup>. These situations will have a profound impact on their self-formation. If the peer who was made a companion has a negative influence, then the teenager can't be followed by negative behaviour as well.

Today, news and reports in print and electronic media related to the issue of the collapse of youth morals are seen to be increasing and alarming (Absha Atiah & Mohd Isa, 2019) <sup>[2]</sup>. The collapse of morality among adolescents as a result of the current modernity and the rapidity of technology is seen to be increasingly the result of the loss of guidance and over-imitating the immoral behaviour displayed in the mass media the effects of excessive gadget use (Aqilah Mior, 2021) <sup>[5]</sup>. Undeniably, the influence that comes from peers has significant relevance in addition to the influence of oneself, family, mass media, western influence, surrounding society and so on (Wan *et al.*, 2013).

In addition to the issue of moral collapse, mental health issues among adolescents are also increasingly worrying (Intan Mas, 2018) <sup>[10]</sup>. The last 2017 National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) statistics revealed mental health conditions among adolescents are on the rise. NHMS 2017 also revealed there are teenagers with mental health. One in every five people has depression (18.3 per cent), two in every five people are plagued with anxiety symptoms (39.7 per cent) and one in every 10 people with stress (9.6 per cent). Teenagers have poor endurance if not given attention and guidance by the closest people. A study conducted by Absha Atiah & Mohd Isa (2019) <sup>[2]</sup> showed that parents who communicate poorly with their children about their needs and problems are affecting their mental health and negative social behaviour. Focusing on academic excellence solely to the point of ignoring the developmental and learning processes that are going through, can invite anxiety and loss of interest in life (Intan Mas, 2018). Therefore, they need to be educated, and attentive and spent time together to become confident and strong people to cope with the emotional urges of their teens.

Therefore, the establishment of the PRS Programme is a good effort and should be continued and empowered from time to time so that negative influences can be replaced by positive influences to enable teenagers to know and build prosperous self-worth. The influence of exemplary and trusted peers can help teens refer to and evaluate their problems. To be a helpful mentor to other friends in need, it is necessary to appreciate the role of being accountable and practice effective skills in building relationships.

Thus, the study highlighted the psychoeducational element through a group counselling approach with six newly appointed PRS members in a secondary school. Study participants focused on this group because they had just been appointed as PRS members. Emphasis on roles and knowledge of basic skills should be given information from the beginning and continuously emphasised so that they are clear about their responsibilities in the process of assisting.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

1. Exploring the personality of Peer Counselor (PRS).
2. Exploring the PRS experience applies basic communication skills.
3. Exploring actions to improve the quality of PRS.

## 3. Literature Review

### Psychoeducational Group Intervention

According to Aslina Ahmad (2013) <sup>[19]</sup>, the number of students involved in group psychoeducation interventions is at least three to five a group. This was emphasized by Corey (2007) <sup>[8]</sup> who stated that more attention and focus can be given in a group that is not too crowded for the discussion to go smoothly and that the group should have the same issues to discuss. In addition, psychoeducational interventions are more structured, discuss specific issues, and focus on self-awareness and emphasis, not on deep self-exposure (Aasheim & Niemann, 2006). When compared to regular counselling sessions, psychoeducation involving the time spent was shorter.

According to Corey *et al.*, (2010) <sup>[9]</sup>, psychoeducational interventions involve the provision of information that is relevant and appropriate to the problems faced by the students involved. Students are guided to acquire the information they need through cognitive and behavioural

strategies. Thus, it can be said that psychoeducational interventions use cognitive approaches to achieve the goals of a given intervention. The inability of a student to find, understand and formulate information becomes a cocoon for them to develop well.

### Peers

Peers can be referred to as a group of children or adolescents who are equal in terms of the same age range, gender or socioeconomic status and share similar interests (Rozita 2009). The influence that exists around peers is the most powerful resource in helping self-development, and changing the values and attitudes of adolescents as at this stage there is a decrease in parental and family influence (Anisa Saleha 2015) <sup>[4]</sup>. The interaction built with peers will influence the development of students, especially in terms of intellectual, personality, emotional and social development as well as in the process of developing student morals in the school (Zakaria Stapa *et al.*, 2012) <sup>[21]</sup>. The effect of socializing with peers can form a commendable personality or vice versa.

According to Zahiruddin & Wan Nasyrudin (2021) <sup>[20]</sup>, the influence of peers who touch on the involvement of outsiders from the family circle of a child or teenager in social interaction can be a very important point in the process of social development. This is because, the peer environment has its sub-culture which consists of influence on intellectual, personality, emotional and social development. If friendships are built with peers, the majority of whom are good, then it is easy for children or teenagers to be educated to be good. On the other hand, if the association is surrounded by peers whose majority are problematic then they will easily follow the same problem (Zakaria Stapa *et al.*, 2012) <sup>[21]</sup>. Therefore, it is important to have peers who have commendable morals so that their influence can influence the positive development of themselves.

### Peer Counselor

PRS leadership in schools is rooted in the "Peer Counselor" service introduced by the School Division of the Guidance and Counseling Unit in 1984. Various improvements were carried out by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) until the PRS leadership module was established for reference today. PRS is a programme to train students to master helpful skills. This is so that they can help fellow students who need help mentally, socially, or emotionally and train them to help themselves. PRS is trained in the field of basic communication and counselling skills. It serves as an effective friend to peers, especially to those who need help. PRS does not work to advise and solve friends' problems but to be a listener who is sensitive to the feelings of others, interested and caring and willing to serve in the school system. This coincides with the 3rd focus of the Guidance and Counseling Services in schools through the Pupil Self-Discipline Improvement Area which is to produce people such as PRS leaders who are competent in human resource generation or human capital (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015).

In addition, regarding the National PRS Module published by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) in 2015, there are 16 roles for students as PRS members. All these roles are ultimately the goal of forming a PRS member who is willing to help with the right skills, establish himself as someone who is approachable and approaches a friend who

needs help as well as being a good example to friends. In addition, according to Ivey *et al* (2014) [12], clients can grow and gain awareness even if the tutor uses only basic skills such as attention-paying skills and listening skills. Attention skills refer to the concept of respect (Tindall & Black, 2015) [18]. Attention skills can involve listening skills and response skills.

**4. Study Methodology**

The design of this study is a qualitative study in the form of case studies through psychoeducational group counselling interventions. Qualitative methods help researchers obtain in-depth information on a case which helps the researcher to have a deep understanding of the context discussed. According to Chua Yan Piau (2014) [7], something unique from the experience of study participants can be learned from the findings of the case study.

**Study Participants**

The participants selected were non-randomised in the form of targeted sampling (*Purposive Sampling*) which is six form-one students of SMK Putrajaya Precinct 9(1) who are members of the Peer Counselor (PRS). The participants were 2 male students and 4 female students. All the participants selected were those who agreed to participate in the study. The basic criteria for the selection of participants

are that they are students who have just been appointed as PRS. In addition, participants were selected regardless of whether students had participated in psychoeducational group interventions before or otherwise.

**Data Collection Methods**

The findings were obtained through verbal and non-verbal interview sharing as well as through module activities. The study was conducted with four sessions arranged face-to-face. This method was chosen because this design can explain in detail the knowledge and experience of the study participants regarding the role of PRS and the basic counselling skills they possess.

The interview and observation data are transcribed into the text for analysis. These data are analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview questions and module activities are guided by the exploration done based on the goals in each session. It aims to see more clearly the level of knowledge about roles and skills. The interview session from start to finish was recorded and recorded using a recorder with the consent of the study participants. Through interview techniques and module activities, the views and experiences of the study participants were explored in depth including the results of the intervention. Thus, the researchers were able to clearly understand and see the effects of the group of psychoeducational interventions.

**Implementation of Counseling Sessions**

Number of Sessions	Explanation
<b>First Session</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introductory sessions, constructing and relationship building.</li> <li>▪ The activity of drawing a picture of oneself and creating partnerships among group members.</li> <li>▪ Creating self-confidence in the presentation of the results of drawing and the dynamics of communication between the members of the group.</li> </ul>
<b>Second Session</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Exploring knowledge of PRS roles and personalities as well as identifying self-advantages and weaknesses through writing activities in A4 paper.</li> <li>▪ Counsellors guide and relate between the role of PRS and the personality of the self that needs to be formed.</li> <li>▪ Each member of the group shares the learning outcomes.</li> </ul>
<b>Third Session</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Exploring the basic skills of counselling with story-sharing activities.</li> <li>▪ Each member is broken up and sits with their respective spouses and then shares the story while being listened to by the couple.</li> <li>▪ Basic skills are explored in discussion activities with counsellors by seeing each other's satisfaction when sharing their stories is heard.</li> </ul>
<b>Fourth Session</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The last session is action planning and termination.</li> <li>▪ Each member sets out an action plan in improving the quality of duties as a PRS member.</li> <li>▪ Each idea is discussed together with a counsellor-guided.</li> <li>▪ Termination is made with each participant giving a formula and counsellors giving compliments and encouragement.</li> </ul>

**Data Analysis Methods**

Interview and observation data were analyzed using thematic and coding processes to produce themes. Specifically, data analysis uses thematic analysis guided by six easy steps introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six (6) steps are: (1) Familiarizing yourself with the data, (2) Generating initial code, (3) Searching for themes, (4) Examining themes, (5) Refining and naming themes, and (6) Generating reports.

**5. Findings of Studies and Discussions**

This chapter will be described in detail the analysis of the findings of the study. The findings answered the objectives of the studies listed by the reviewers. Data are obtained through interview techniques conducted on a group basis of psychoeducation using case study methods. The study

involved six members of Peer Counselors (PRS) who were all from one student. They will be coded as Study Participants (PK); PK 1, PK 2, PK 3, PK 4, PK 5 and PK 6 in this study.

**Demographic Information of Study Participants**

**Table 1:** Distribution of study participants by gender and age

S. No	Study Participant Code (PK)	Gender	Age	Period as PRS
1	PK 1	Man	13 years old	1 week
2	PK 2	Man	13 years old	1 week
3	PK 3	Woman	13 years old	1 week
4	PK 4	Woman	13 years old	1 week
5	PK 5	Woman	13 years old	1 week
6	PK 6	Woman	13 years old	1 week

Based on Table 1, the demographic distribution of study participants is selected according to gender, age and period equally appointed as PRS members. The study participants consisted of six people including two male PRS and four female PRSs who were all thirteen years old. Study participants were selected to explore their knowledge of the role and skills of being a PRS member.

The findings showed that there are three main themes based on the objectives of the study: (1) Knowledge of PRS personality, (2) Basic PRS skills, and (3) Action to improve the quality of PRS.

### Theme 1: Peer Guide Personality (PRS)

#### 1. Bold

Study participants (PK) 4, 5 and 6 gave the same view on the role of PRS which is to be brave. Being brave here gives a bold meaning to speak and reprimand if you see the mistakes that friends have made. The courage they have will facilitate the delivery of information to the needy. If it doesn't have the courage, PRS can't do its job well.

*"... I'm a shy person and it's hard to start talking to new friends... I realized when I became PRS, I was brave... I'm going to build that self-esteem because so PRS must be brave enough to say..." (PK 4)*

*"... PRS must have the courage to help a friend... If you don't dare, how to help others, right... I mean to dare to speak..." (PK 5)*

*"... PRS role for me dare to reprimand friends.. Let them know these peer guides... We dare to give advice... But I feel weak to reprimand a friend for not being brave." (PK 6)*

They are aware of the inherent weakness of the PRS which is that there is no courage to speak, reprimand and start a conversation. This awareness is important in the early stages they are appointed as PRS so that self-quality can be improved over time. Feelings of fear and lack of confidence will result in two-way communication and a less effective information delivery process (Jamilah *et al.*, 2015)<sup>[13]</sup>.

#### 2. Helping a Friend

Almost the majority of study participants mentioned that one of the main roles of PRS is helping a friend. They believe that PRS identity is very close to helpful individuals. Being PRS leads them to be more sensitive to individuals who need help.

*"... PRS needs to be sensitive to the feelings of others and the surrounding circumstances... For me if you want to help someone else, we need to understand the situation he's just happy to help... to help need to be mature..." (PK 1)*

*"... PRS's role is to provide advice and motivation to people who need help..." (PK 2)*

*"... Kene diligently help people, friends and teachers... hear grievances and know how they feel..." (PK 3)*

*"...being PRS will know more about self-interest and also always be diligent to help our friends and teachers around us..." (PK 4)*

*"... PRS must have the courage to help a friend... If you don't dare, how to help others, right..." (PK 5)*

As stated in the National PRS Module (Ministry of Education Malaysia 2015) that the PRS philosophy is 'self-help to help others as the basis in the discussion with the study participants. Researchers emphasize to them that helping others is a noble act. Although the roles mentioned by them are one of the most basic roles, the awareness to help is a very good thing.

#### 3. Keeping Secrets

Three study participants emphasized the role of PRS to keep other people's matters secret. They understand the ugliness and shame of friends do not need to be told to the public and kept well. The consequences of not keeping secrets and stories of friends who have problems can affect the good name of PRS as a trusted guide.

*"... If there's a friend close to us about him, we must take care of his feelings by not telling anyone else... must be kene take care of his shame... if not as a PRS, as a friend it must be mature..." (PK 1)*

*"... PRS role in addition to helping people, must be good at keeping the personal things of the person who is helped to secret... We don't even like our secrets being leaked... people already trust us..." (PK 4)*

*"... When we hear a friend's grievances, we know and understand how he feels... what he said must be kene take care of really..." (PK 3)*

Trust and keeping secrets is ethical as PRS emphasized in the National PRS Module (Ministry of Education Malaysia 2015). The same is stated in the role of PRS which emphasizes being a friend who is sensitive to the feelings of others and the surrounding situation as well as complying with the ethics of confidentiality.

### Theme 2: Basic Peer Guiders Communication Skills (PRS)

#### 1. Pay Attention when Listening

Three of the six study participants felt that paying attention while listening could bring relief and comfort to continue sharing stories and expressing themselves. The presence of others who are willing to listen and spend time together can finally bring peace of mind after being heard. If a person is listening but does not pay attention, the desire to continue telling a story becomes stunted and not enthusiastic.

*"... When I told you about it, my friend looked me in the face and focused on my story... It's been a long time since it's fun to tell a story because someone pays attention and is willing to listen... I feel relieved and comfortable expressing..." (PK 1)*



"... I feel hurt when I'm saying that a friend who listens **doesn't pay so much attention**... feeling lazy to tell and share..." (PK 2)

"... The activity was fun... I'm relieved that someone is willing to hear my story... My friend is **paying attention and listening to me** say until it's over... even if he doesn't have any response..." (PK 3)

The skill of paying attention is a basic skill that is important for those involved in this help process to practice. According to Ivey *et al.* (2014) [12], clients can grow and benefit even if the tutor only practices attention-paying behaviour skills and uses the basics of listening skills such as observing and encouraging skills throughout the help session. Awareness of behaviour to pay attention when listening among the study participants after experiencing the experience through the activities carried out, giving them useful exposure. Situations, where others are willing to listen to their stories until they are done, provide some comfort to share.

## 2. Not Quick to Respond

Study participants 5 and 6 gave the view that a listener should not be quick to respond to views on the situation that is happening to someone who is overflowing before listening to the end. This activity exposes them to be patient in listening and not to judge other people's problems quickly and not to put self-worth in other people's problems because everyone's problems and situations are different.

"... I'd be angry if the person who was listening to me said **quickly to respond**. don't wait for me to talk first... I also realized that if I want to be a listener, I can't quickly 'judge' people... It's heartbreaking that a person is quick to 'judge' our situation. It's like he's not sincerely listening..." (PK 5)

"... I liked the activity because I felt calm to share the story. Calm down when the friend hears me say and is **not quick to give an opinion**..." (PK 4)

Among the things that need to be careful is not to be quick to respond and have opinions about other people's problems. Responding in the form of sentences that describe communication barriers can lead to self-exploration will not be smooth. As emphasized in the National PRS Module (Ministry of Education Malaysia 2015), the process of listening to understand should be prioritised first rather than listening to respond alone.

## Theme 3: Action Planning Enhancing Quality as PRS

### 1. Guide Friends towards the Good

Study participants 1 and 3 stated that they wanted to be good friends and aspired to always strive to guide friends towards good. They want to be a good role model to follow and dare to reprimand if they find a friend who made a mistake.

"... I wrote here three things I want to do which is **guide friends towards good**, prosecute friends and constantly remind friends of the afterlife... By being this PRS I want to help a friend..." (PK 1)

"... I want to help a friend in distress... I'd like to **reprimand a friend if a friend is wrong**... don't mock each other... I don't want to talk bad about friends... I want to be a good example to my friends..." (PK 3)

According to Irwan Fariza *et al.* (2018) [11], peers become a place for teenagers to express problems and become a substitute for parents in school. Peer influence is the most powerful resource in helping self-development, and changing the values and attitudes of adolescents as the influence of parents and family begins to decrease during the early teens. Interacting with peers who can guide them towards good and set a good example to follow will influence the development of students, especially in intellectual, personality, emotional and social development as well as the process of developing students' morals in school (Zakaria Stapa *et al.*, 2012) [21]. The presence of PRS that performs responsibilities well and on time shows a good example and can give guidance to other colleagues.

### 2. Pay Attention when Listening

Study participants 2, 3, 4 and 5 agreed that they wanted to be better listener and pay attention when a friend was talking to them. They believe that everyone will be comfortable talking and expressing what is playing and be in their mind if the person who is listening to pays attention. Just as they like others to pay attention when they are talking, so will they do when they are being a listener.

"... Then I want to **pay attention when** friends come to talk to me... If a friend is telling me don't do anything else..." (PK 2)

"... I'd like to **pay attention** if my best friend is talking..." (PK 3)

"... I want to be a good friend and I strive to be a good listening and patient friend..." (PK 4)

"...want to help people and always **pay attention** when talking to others..." (PK 5)

According to Mariah Kamaruddin *et al.*, (2020) [16], paying attention can be shown when PRS pays undivided attention or maximum attention to a guided friend. This behaviour is exhibited through verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Effective assistance will result if PRS becomes an active listener with other intentions of paying attention. This supports the findings of this study when the effects of activities increase awareness and the desire to pay attention during the process of helping.

### 3. Keeping Secrets

Study participants 3 and 6 wanted to be a friend who was good at keeping other friends secret. If a friend comes to share a story or a problem that is being faced, they will try to protect the friend's heart by not revealing it to others. They understand that building trust among themselves is important to be a good PRS in carrying out their responsibilities as a partner who helps other partners.

"... I want to **keep** my friend's secret... If a friend has come to talk about his story to share the problem, I

*must keep him secret... If you're not good at keeping secrets, then no one believes near us..." (PK 3)*

*"...I want to keep my good friend a secret and I want to be a friend who strives to be a loyal friend and help a good friend..." (PK 6)*

Among the ethics, as PRS emphasized in the National PRS Module (Ministry of Education Malaysia 2015) is the ethics of trust and keeping secrets. The awareness and actions that the study participants will take to keep secret friends who seek help from them, demonstrate the good ethics that they are forming. The process of helping requires a good relationship that begins with building trust that all information shared will be kept confidential.

## 6. Conclusion

Psychoeducational interventions can provide knowledge and literacy to PRS about their role and efforts towards self-development to carry out the responsibilities given. However, this study only provides early exposure as the study participants have just been appointed as PRS. This gives them some explanation and insight into how a PRS should play a role in building confidence to work after receiving knowledge from the intervention process.

The researchers hope that this study can be used as a guide for High School Guidance and Counseling Teachers to see the potential already in PRS and continue to guide and monitor from time to time. The information obtained can be used as a reference to improve and improve to be in line with the goals of the existence of PRS in schools. As a recommendation for future studies, the modules used in this study can be reviewed by senior PRS members to see how well they understand the role of PRS and explore their experiences in helping their colleagues throughout their time as PRS members.

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